

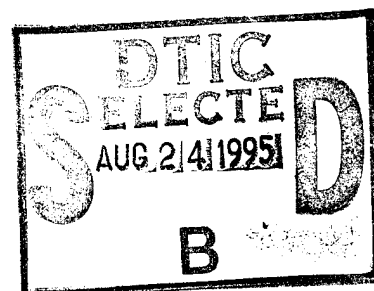
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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
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DECEPTION: Here to Stay!

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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16 June 1995

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## Abstract

Although military historians have filled libraries with valuable information concerning deception, it was not until Operation Desert Storm that military leaders used deception as an integral part of a major operation. During Operation Desert Storm, deception surfaced as a major force multiplier after being largely ignored from World II until the Persian Gulf War. Ironically, deception was never used as a force multiplier, during the Korean War or the Vietnam War. Ultimately, if deception is to remain a major force multiplier, the military needs to continue to examine and to re-evaluate practice and doctrine. As history has proven, operational success is enhanced when deception is a central part of the operation.

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## **DECEPTION: HERE TO STAY!**

The military has again recognized deception as a valuable tool for the operational commander. After lying dormant for forty years, the Persian Gulf War brought deception once again to the forefront of military planning. With increasing resource constraints, deception has become an important force multiplier. This paper will examine the art of deception as an effective tool for the operational commander, considering historical and contemporary definitions/theories, its effective use during World War II, its forty year demise, and its resurgence during the Persian Gulf War.

### **Defining Deception.**

The art of military deception continues to be regarded, as it has for centuries, as a credible means to gain a monumental advantage over an adversary. Success at the operational level must employ a well-understood and well-executed deception plan. Deception generates uncertainty, resulting in delayed responses by enemy forces; therefore, a decisive advantage can be gained by practicing the art of deception.

Deception is not one of the operational principles of war, but it has been recognized for hundreds of years as a key to victory in all levels of war. JCS Pub 1 defines deception as "those measures designed to mislead the enemy forces by manipulation, distortion or falsification of evidence to induce them to react in a manner prejudiced to their interests."<sup>1</sup> The

U.S. Army doctrine defines deception as "actions which mislead the enemy and induce him to do something counter to his interests."<sup>2</sup> It includes manipulating, distorting, or falsifying information available to the enemy to insure security to real plans, operation, or activities. Dr. Michael Handel defines deception as "a purposeful attempt by the deceiver to manipulate the perceptions of the target's decision makers in order to gain a competitive advantage."<sup>3</sup> The common theme in all three definition is that successful deception results in luring the enemy commander's operation to fit the desires of the deceiver. Simply put: deception conceals the real and reveals the false.

Deception and surprise, although related, are often confused. Historically, when deception succeeds, surprise results and generally, it is the defender who is surprised by a challenger's deception. Surprise, one of the Principles of War, is a desired state; it is the condition achieved when we strike an unprepared enemy. On the other hand, deception is usually a series of planned actions intended to deliberately mislead the enemy. Deception, therefore, is a means to obtain surprise. The payoff for deception is high, because of the surprise factor which multiplies the chances for quick and decisive military success. In Whaley's study of deception operations, he found that a successful deception has at least an eighty per cent chance of yielding surprise.<sup>4</sup>

Deception must incorporate several elements to be successful as a force multiplier. The most important is secrecy. Any

breach of secrecy concerning one's actual intentions may lead to failure, self-deception, or even become an instrument for the adversary's own purposes.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, too much secrecy can be a bad thing. There must be an ideal balance in the secrecy equation. On one hand, it is the dilemma of deception that the deceiver must depend on the enemy's intelligence system to receive, correctly interpret, and logically react to deceptive signals. On the other hand, the enemy must remain weak so as not to effectively counter actual intentions.

Plausibility is another element of deception. The deception must fit within the likely courses of action, as predicted by the enemy's understanding of his opponent's doctrine and tactics. Knowing the enemy, his doctrine, his perception of the battlefield, and his likely reaction to our initiatives, are all essential to successful deception operations.

The last element of deception is adaptability. No matter how elaborate a deception plan is constructed, it must adapt to the changing situation. If the deception plan is not adapted in a timely manner to the changing situation, the inconsistencies in doctrine and tactics could reveal the deception.

There are also differences in deception at the different levels of war. Planners must understand and differentiate between strategic, operational and tactical deception.

Strategic deception is "planned and executed by and in support of senior military commanders to result in adversary military policies and actions that support the originator's

strategic military objectives, policies, and operations."<sup>6</sup>

Operational deception is "planned and executed by and in support of operational-level favorable to the originator's objectives and operations."<sup>7</sup> It is "planned and conducted in a theater of war to support campaigns and major operations."<sup>8</sup> Tactical deception is "planned and executed by and in support of tactical commanders to result in adversary actions that are favorable to the originator's objectives and operations."<sup>9</sup> It is "planned and conducted to support battles and engagements."<sup>10</sup>

Deception, as defined, is one of the surest ways to achieve or create surprise. It can cause an enemy to move, stop, attack, or defend. Deception must have a sound doctrinal basis to be integrated into operational plans, and a good deception effort does not have to be complex, only believable.

Thus far, I have examined the elements of deception; however, to thoroughly understand deception is to understand its theoretical implications.

### **Deception Theory**

Deception has long been recognized as one of the most important elements inherent in warfare. Since a force cannot be strong at all points, successful deception disguises actual dispositions on the battlefield. More than that, it causes opponents to make decisions that place them in a disadvantageous position. Deception in warfare is not new. It has long been associated with the fundamental principle of surprise. Deception

on the ancient battlefield was a vital ingredient for victory in a time when opposing armies were homogeneous in nature. It was a very rare occurrence for one side to gain a technological advantage that might help tip the scales between equally balanced forces. The successful use of deception often proved to be the only means whereby an equal or smaller sized force could decisively defeat an opponent. The importance of deception was eloquently stated by Sun Tzu:

"All warfare is based on deception. Therefore when capable, feign incapacity: when active, inactivity. When near, make it appear that you are far away: when far away, that you are near. Offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike."<sup>11</sup>

This thought captures the essence of deception. Sun Tzu's guidance implores the commander to use all the tools at his disposal to confuse his opponent as to his capabilities and intent. Sun Tzu suggests you can lure the enemy and destroy him when he inaccurately is convinced of your weakness. This philosophy remains valid as a force multiplier for the operational commander.

Clausewitz, however, took a totally different viewpoint on the worth of deception and surprise. Where Sun Tzu stressed the use of deception and surprise at all levels and all the time, Clausewitz felt the utility of deception and surprise was best at the tactical level. For Clausewitz, surprise is fundamentally important, but a plan's success should not be based solely on secrecy because of the uncertainty brought about by the friction and the fog of war.



Clausewitz put little faith in the value of diversion and deception, which he saw as too time consuming, costly, and the last resort of the weak and desperate:

"To prepare a sham action with sufficient thoroughness to impress an enemy requires a considerable expenditure of time and effort, and the costs increase with the scale of the deception. Normally they call for more than can be spared, and consequently so-called strategic feints rarely have the desired effect. It is dangerous, in fact, to use substantial forces over any length of time merely to create an illusion; there is always the risk that nothing will be gained and that the troops deployed will not be available when they are needed."<sup>12</sup>

Clausewitz's theory of victory was to seek the enemy's center of gravity and then concentrate superior force at the decisive point. Clausewitz stressed the "destruction of the enemy's forces,"<sup>13</sup> suggesting that the enemy must be put in such a condition that they can no longer fight. Clausewitz emphasized, that superiority in numbers was the real key to victory. In book three, chapter ten, On War, Clausewitz placed his strongest emphases on deception. In his explanation of cunning, he stated that "the use of trick or stratagem permits the intended victim to make his own mistakes, which combined in a single result, suddenly change the nature of the situation before his eyes."<sup>14</sup> In the end, Clausewitz concluded that diversionary attacks and other ruse de guerre resulted in less troops available to the commander at the decisive point and were, therefore, a wasted effort.

I believe that operational deception lies somewhere between the two extremes of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz. Historically, these two theorists have been the cornerstones for the development of

the different philosophies towards warfare. Michael Handel wrote that "the art of deception can only be cultivated and learned through history, the experience of one's contemporaries, and the encouragement of creativity and imagination in the military."<sup>15</sup> Therefore, by studying such theorists, military leaders at the operational level will understand and recognize the importance of achieving deception on the battlefield. As proven throughout history, deception acts as a force multiplier when skillfully employed in conjunction with the other principles of war. History provides us with several excellent examples of successful deception at the operational level up to World War II. During World War II, deception as a force multiplier was at its peak; however, after World War II deception became nonexistent.

### **Is Deception Useful?**

Early deception efforts through the end of World War I were left to the initiative and creativity of commanders. These leaders usually operated at the lower tactical level and occasionally at the operational level. All this changed during the Second World War, when deception became the focus of formally organized staff work. For the first time, systematic, organized, and continuous deception operations were conducted from the highest levels of government. The British led the way toward establishing a deception thinking and organization, particularly in desert warfare. The practice of deception in the desert was developed into an art as a successful British operations in the

deserts of the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> It became so successful and convincing that the British developed a single group in London, the London Controlling Section (LCS), which coordinated all deception operations and directed the efficient sharing of intelligence information between all staffs. Henceforth, for every operational plan developed, a plausible deception was generated to support it.

By 1944 nobody needed convincing that deception operations paid off. Even the Americans, who had initially regarded deception as an unnecessary tact in view of their superior strength, mobility, firepower and material resources, had accepted the idea.<sup>17</sup> The deception plan for Operation Overlord is an example of how much effort the allies put in time, resources, and manpower towards the development of a deception plan. This plan, called Operation Bodyguard, was to become the most challenging deception plan in the history of warfare. During this period, deception had progressed to its height. Members of the LCS, who drafted the deception plans, understood Sun Tzu's philosophy that deception is the key to success in war. Likewise, they agreed with Clausewitz's philosophy that the importance of the enemy's center of gravity and the concentration of superior force at the decisive point for the final victory was essential. In theory, the LCS planners focus tried to balance Sun Tzu's and Clausewitz's theories. Additionally, they understood the importance of secrecy, plausibility, and adaptability when developing deception operations. Ultimately,

deception was effectively utilized and a major force multiplier during World War II.

As World War II came to a close, the military staffs at each level of command had become competent in fighting and deception. The years following World War II ushered in the atomic age. The United States Armed Forces, especially the Army, changed radically in both structure and concept to meet changing demands. Deception appeared unimportant. It was generally believed that future wars would be atomic. Given the United States' nuclear monopoly, Army planners saw little need to update deception doctrine or train commanders in its use. Therefore, the military saw a drastic decline in training and doctrine development dealing with deception. Deception was rapidly becoming a forgotten military art.

Even with the Korean War, deception never played a major role in the war. Even though the landing at Inchon was a complete surprise, it lacked deception. During the war, United States units were typically road bound and moved during the day relying on superior firepower, both ground and air, to defeat the enemy attacks. At this time, the United States only use of deception focused on nuclear strategy; i.e. the hiding of delivery system and decoy silos.

The Vietnam War brought a new form of war-fighting emphasizing counterinsurgency. For the next ten years, counterinsurgency drove Army doctrine, just as nuclear weapons had done during the fifties. There was no coordinated military

deception effort during the Vietnam War.<sup>18</sup> It was not until mid 1980 that the Army brought a resurgence of interest in the operational level of war and deception. During this period (mid 1980), the current Army deception doctrine is principally found in two manuals: FM 100-5 Operations, May 1986, and FM 90-2 Battlefield Deception, October 1988. However, since then the Army has updated FM 100-5 as of June of 1993, the Marine Corps has published FMFM 7-13 Military Deception, 1992, and the United States Joint chiefs of Staff produced Joint Pub 3-58 Doctrine for Joint Operational Deception, June 1994.

In summary, deception played a vital role during World War II and then faded away until the mid 1980s. Lost, for over forty years, the United States Armed Forces had no vision, doctrine, or concept dealing with deception. In the mid 1980s with the United States Armed Forces resurgence of interest, deception once again came to the forefront. Events in Southwest Asia would prove that deception could once again be a valid force multiplier.

### **The Rebirth of Deception.**

While many differ on the use of deception, some would contend that deception has changed in its utility in this age of advanced technology, rapidity of the battlefield engagement, and maneuver. Examining the Persian Gulf War (Desert Storm) illustrates how deception played a major role in the outcome and, most importantly, how it saved lives. Much of the actual planning and execution of this operation is still classified; therefore,

deception information gathered for this paper comes from unclassified and open sources.

The original USCENTCOM plan for Desert Storm called for a frontal attack from Saudi Arabia onto fortified Iraqi positions in Kuwait. This attack would be supported by an amphibious assault, whose goal was to liberate Kuwait and to destroy the Republican Guard. The plan was later disapproved and replaced by the "Hail Mary Pass" --- or western movement and the envelopment of Iraqi positions by the VII U.S. Army and 18th Airborne Corps, with a supporting attack by coalition forces from Saudi Arabia directly into Kuwait. To implement this plan, USCENTCOM developed a deception strategy which supported the operational plan.

As earlier defined, Professor Handel defines deception "as a purposeful attempt by the deceiver to manipulate the perceptions of the target's decision makers in order to gain a competitive advantage."<sup>19</sup> He maintains that there are three basic forms/types of deception, of which all three played an intricate part in the overall deception plan General Schwarzkopf implemented in support of Operation Desert Storm:

1. To misdirect the enemy's attention, causing him to concentrate his forces in the wrong place.<sup>20</sup>
2. To make the adversary violate the so-called principle of the economy of force. The object here is to make the opponent squander his resources on non-existent targets and in unimportant directions.<sup>21</sup>

3. Intention to surprise the opponent- to create a situation that will subsequently cause him to be caught off guard and unprepared for action.<sup>22</sup>

These forms of deception illustrate how the Persian Gulf War reemphasized the importance of deception and prove that a coalition force, even with superior firepower, can utilize deception effectively to save lives and resources.

#### **Misdirect the Enemy's Attention.**

The objective of the amphibious deception plan was to fix the Iraqis in place in southern Kuwait by **tying down an estimated five divisions** on the Persian Gulf coast south of Kuwait city.<sup>23</sup> The Iraqis believed the Coalition would conduct an amphibious assault in Kuwait in conjunction with a frontal assault from Saudi Arabia. This played right into General Schwarzkopf's operational plan. With the 4th and 5th MEBs and 13th MEU(SOC) conducting a number of amphibious training landings this reinforced the Iraqi's belief that a Marine amphibious landing in Kuwait was imminent. A graphic indication that the amphibious deception worked was revealed when the Marines found an elaborate sand table in an Iraqi corps headquarters in Kuwait City, showing the forces arrayed to defend against the amphibious assault.<sup>24</sup> The Kuwait deception plan, like the deception during D-Day when Hitler believed the allies would launch a cross channel invasion by landing in the Pas de Calais area and not at Normandy, was successful because the adversary believed it. As in the Normandy invasion, information was released to the Iraqis over a period of

time and through selective sources. As the air offensive began, Iraqis intelligence gathering capabilities were reduced, thus limiting their ability to gather information on the coalition to the world wide news media.

The role the media unwittingly played in promoting the deception to conduct an amphibious landing in Kuwait was a major contributor to its success. Consciously, the news media was given liberal access to cover field training exercises, amphibious rehearsals, and other events in a manner that reinforced the deceptive scheme. This was never so evident than when an article from Newsweek appeared two weeks prior to the ground assault which spelled out the details on the upcoming amphibious assault.<sup>25</sup> It was assumed that the Iraqi high command watched these amphibious exercises, and believed the press reports only enforced their belief of a frontal attack supported by an amphibious landing. This proved that deception, even in the age of advanced technology, can be successful.

#### **Violate the So-Called Principle of the Economy of Force.**

Professor Handel stresses the importance of forcing the enemy to waste his resources in tactical situations. I propose that the Iraqis wasted major resources such as mines, concrete, heavy building materials, and time for the construction of a major barrier plan for the prevention of an amphibious landing along the coast line of Kuwait. The Iraqis had erected a formidable barrier system along the Kuwait "coast" line, which was covered



by their sizable artillery forces. This system consisted of minefields, barbed wire, deep trenches, concrete bunkers, and other concrete obstacles on the shore. In the water, there were underwater obstacles, mines and barbed wire to channelize, impede, ensnare and disable landing craft and vehicles. Because of the possibility of an amphibious landing, the Iraqis were forced to put the time, manpower, and valuable material resources into building a protective barrier.

#### **Intention to Surprise the Opponent.**

Professor Handel states that surprise is to catch your opponent off guard and unprepared.<sup>26</sup> Schwarzkopf did exactly that. With the Iraqis convinced that the coalition forces would conduct a frontal attack from the south, in conjunction with an amphibious assault on Kuwait City, the famous "Hail Mary Pass" concept was conceived. The plan called for a major amphibious assault feint into Kuwait, along with a frontal attack through the minefields by the Marines to recapture Kuwait City. Hours after the frontal attack commenced, the VII U.S. Army and 18th Airborne Corps kicked off the main attack (Hail Mary Pass) by enveloping to the west, deep into Iraq, to circle around Iraqi defense and engaged the heavy armor and Republican guard. This successful maneuver caught the Iraqi army totally off guard. Deception had played its part.

#### **Conclusion**

The operational deception plan during Desert Storm was successful. The Iraqi forces remained poised for an attack that

never came and were quickly overrun from the flank. The success of Desert Storm brought operational deception out of the shadows of the Korean and Vietnam era, to once again being a major force multiplier as it was during World War II. The value of deception must not be forgotten. This is an opportunity that military leaders cannot afford to let quietly slip back into oblivion. Military historians have filled the libraries with different philosophies on deception and to continue to provide lip service to one of the most credible of all force multipliers would be disastrous. Deception at the operational level is an invaluable tool. Lt. General Bernard E. Trainer, USMC(Ret) recognized the significance of deception when he wrote, "Deception has principles and characteristics, but it has no rules. It is the playground of the creative mind. As a force multiplier it is without match and may be employed at every level of warfare. Like any techniques, it must be practiced to be perfected."<sup>27</sup> If we abide by the axiom that we should fight as we train, then we must focus more attention in training our commanders and operational planners on the significance of creating deception operations. Just as operational deception was successful in the past (World War II and Desert Storm), it must be used in the future to shape the battlefield to our advantage.

## ENDNOTES

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24. Floyd D. Kennedy, Jr., "Deception in the Gulf," National Defense, April 1991, p. 38.

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